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ABSTRACT

In recent years, colleges have made extensive efforts to provide distance learning opportunities for adult students. At Southwest Texas State University, a required course in the Occupational Education program has been delivered in a modified video format. The video was made of an actual class being taught in a production studio. The main difference in the traditional use of a video course and this modified video course was that, instead of copies of the video being distributed to the students in the course, the video was packaged and shown to several remote live classes during the same week it was produced. Students who viewed the video at remote sites could communicate with the professor by telephone, e-mail, fax, actual appointments, regular mail, and through submission of homework and questions to a monitor at each remote site. The night monitor system was one of the unique features of the modified system. The monitor showed the video at each site, collected homework and assisted students with basic information. He or she also maintained weekly contact with the instructor through assisting with filming of the live video as well as discussion with the instructor. In order for the program to work, there must be competent monitors, reliable video equipment, strict classroom rules, and ease of communication with the instructor. The modified video method provides an alternative for students that is less expensive, offers some degree of interaction, and still promotes a classroom environment. (KC)

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Modified Video Course Methodology for Distance Learning

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Modified Video Course Methodology for Distance Learning

In the last few years there has been an extensive effort by colleges and universities nationwide to provide distance learning opportunities for teachers and others who need expanded methodologies for their learning. Essentially adults have found that traditional hours of learning as well as modes of delivery do not meet their learning needs.

The changes, although slow in coming, have meant that barriers once faced by the learner are all but eliminated for the new century. This change in ways to prepare learners and to teach has arrived in numerous packages.

Some of these methods need to be outlined:

Correspondence- this has enabled individuals to order courses on demand and work on written lessons delivered to their homes. Some colleges even have master's level courses in this format.

Telecourses- Although an older technology this has provided courses through the learner's television. Certainly a positive option this has been limited by the requirement to view the material only during a specified time frame.

Extension Courses- also known as "client funded courses", extension classes, have been favored for a number of years. Unfortunately transportation of the instructor as well as instructor identification for a remote site has been a concern in this method's use.

Audio Courses- Often used by companies and motivational speakers audio learning has had its "day in the sun." Without visual stimulation some learners find it difficult to listen to a speaker for hours therefore the video has been a welcome replacement.

Video Courses- Prepackaged videotapes mailed to the learner has given the learner flexibility in viewing, home use and visual stimulation all in one

course. Yet, even with all its positive points it still lacked the immediate feedback of a live class or instructor guidance at a remote site.

"Virtual" Courses- A popular concept now is to have numerous learning sites connected to the classroom and allow for two way video and two way audio. Certainly "trendy" the costs have been high in the initial "startup".

Web Based Courses- Various institutions have developed web-based courses allowing 24-hour access, instructor on line contact and self paced learning. There is still another way to provide some of these benefits. This is the Modified video method, which will be explored later in the paper.

Benefits of Distance Learning

Prior to exploring this method of instructional delivery it is important to review the benefits of distance learning. Although some of the benefits have been suggested there are actually four benefits that are sought in the establishment of a productive distance learning program:

Accessibility has been a key feature for those interested in distance learning. Remote areas in many parts of the United States have been largely undeserved by various professional programs including teacher preparation courses. Through the use of many of these methods improvement is obvious as one surfs the net in search of remote educational opportunities.

Availability closely tied in with accessibility has been a problem for some learners. Although the learner may have accessibility to the university certain programs were not available. Distance learning has all but eliminated the barriers we have in relation to programs which were not available a few years ago.

Another area distance learning options has addressed is the issue of individualized instruction. Several of the options specifically make it possible to provide individualized instruction, which appeals to many adult learners. In addition the options also can give the learner the ability to learn at his or her own pace. Web Based instruction and video learning have been champions in this area.

Finally, the entire array of distance learning options provides an aspect of motivation for the student since he or she has more opportunity to obtain a goal that was an abstraction before the new options existed. This motivation can be strong and decisive in helping a learner begin the education process.

Challenge to Video Learning

Although there are some very positive viewpoints in regard to the concept of distance learning, video delivery has not gone unchallenged. Certainly some would be critical of video learning because it is an older Technology and because of this it is would not be useful. Therefore, despite any positive comments it might not be considered in an institution's delivery system.

Another problem encountered is the issue of being an impersonal way to learn as well as not being a method that could be used in a group setting. Finally, the detractors may point at the cost to produce a video professionally. Studio productions can be extremely costly and obviously time consuming.

Knowing these criticisms the Occupational Education program at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas embarked on an experiment to combine several delivery elements into a new system, which was addressed as the modified video.

Experiment at Southwest Texas State University

The Occupational Education program at Southwest Texas State University is a nontraditional and interdisciplinary program, which serves the IH35 corridor from Austin to San Antonio. Developed in 1973, the program has two Masters degrees as well as a large Bachelor's program.

Students in the program have the option to apply for worklife credit, test out of courses and use various forms of distance learning. One of the essential courses in the Bachelor's program is the Occupational Education 4350

which is a diagnostic course required of all students seeking a Bachelor's degree through the program.

The course was, until the experiment, limited to live delivery on site. However, this was not meeting the needs of the adults since numerous students found it difficult to travel to the main campus to take the course.

To solve the problem it was necessary to develop another format for the OCED 4350 course. The video format was chosen. However it was decided that the course would be established on a modified format, which would offer a unique way to utilize the video.

Steps in Development

To develop the new modified video production administrative permission was secured and an application for funding was developed to video the course in the university studio. The funding secured was not to build a production with "all the bells and whistles" of a television production. Instead the video would be made of an actual class being taught in the studio.

Certainly risks would be taken by having no formal script other than a regular class as well as the professor teaching the subject and the videos being developed based only on the class being taught. Initially to assist in the process the professor became acquainted with the studio and notified the students that they would be in a video during the course. Permission was then secured from the students to allow the university to show the video after the course was completed. Later the course materials the professor had used in the past were altered and increased in size for use in the studio for the "Elmo". This allowed the professor to use transparencies for the "live class" and also be easily seen by the video class. An intern was also trained for the operation of the studio equipment and the filming began.

Utilization

The main difference in the traditional video course and this "modified" video course was the use of the actual video. Instead of copies of the video being reproduced and distributed to the students in the course, the video was packaged and shown to several remote "live classes" during the same week it was produced. This method was far less expensive than a production in a studio and then doing extensive editing and filming parts of the production again. In essence only minor editing was done and the emphasis was placed on the professor to make certain it was satisfactory at the time it was filmed.

Students in "video land" as they were named by the professor had five ways with which to communicate with him. Initially after they viewed the video at any of the sites of their choice they could contact him by various methods. These methods included phone, email, fax, actual appointments, regular mail, and though submission of homework and questions in a special file box carried back and forth by the monitor to each remote site.

This night monitor system was one of the more unique features of the "modified system". The monitor showed the video at each site, collected any homework and assisted the students with basic information. He then maintained weekly contact with the instructor through assisting with the filming of the live video as well as discussion with the instructor in regard to the course. In the semesters that followed the assigned monitor, although not involved now in filming, still maintained direct contact with the professor of record.

Methods to Maintain Interest

Certainly in trying to make a video presentation more personal there are many concerns. Essentially the instructor has to view the video as a "theater performance" each day the video is filmed. Furthermore the "shelf life" of the video must be considered in any references to current events. In filming the video is essential to exercise care in limiting references to current events. Otherwise the students watching the production a year or more later may feel more remote from the instructor and instruction.

During the filming itself the instructor used humor to maintain the audience's attention as well as humorous transparencies at some points to illustrate a concept and capture the video and live audience. Changing the pace during the filming and being as personal as possible can be very effective in the preparation of the video.

Assessment of the "Modified Video"

In reviewing the "modified" concept of showing the video to students in remote locations there were several difficulties encountered. First there must be excellent night monitors/interns who can set up the equipment, answer basic questions and maintain a studious atmosphere at each showing of the video. Sometime problems with AV equipment at remote sites can be a real challenge. Backup plans must be developed and in readiness if the situation occurs. Plus if the night monitor is not taking the program seriously the students will also discount the system.

Because of the limited instructor contact in the actual class setting, the instructor must be available by the other methods as previously discussed. Communication needs to be as open and free as possible in order to make the system work. This lack of the actual professor being present also can be a problem with students in the video showing deciding to talk or walk out at critical times. Strict classroom guidelines must be implemented at the first video class. Otherwise there can be some important points missed and also some students may disrupt others during the sessions.

Certainly from a positive view there are many things that the "modified" video provides. Initially it maintained group cohesion at each site and still allowed students to use collective learning and wisdom to deal with the course. It also provided the course closer to the homes of the students and avoided travel for the instructor. Finally it allowed more classes to be taught in one semester. In effect it provides multiple classrooms in remote locations for a less expensive investment.

Conclusions

In summary this "modified" video method provides an alternative to the numerous distance learning initiatives. It is less expensive, offers some degree of interaction with students and still promotes a classroom environment rather than having all the students learning through the video at their own homes or offices. As long as it is realized that this is simply another option in the array of options to assist students the method can be very positive.